

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
June 22, 2016

- ITEM: 11
- SUBJECT: Information Item: Presentation of Water Quality Conditions in the San Mateo and San Diego River Watersheds (Betty Fetscher & Chad Loflen)
- PURPOSE: To provide information to the Board and the public on newly released “status sheets” addressing conditions in San Diego River and San Mateo Creek watersheds.
- RECOMMENDATION: This is an information item only; no action will be taken by the Board at today’s meeting.
- KEY ISSUES: The conditions in the status sheets are assessed based on bioassessment and habitat conditions, rather than aquatic chemistry water quality objectives.
- PRACTICAL VISION: The assessment of San Diego River watershed conditions constitutes a component of a specific Practical Vision Chapter 2 (Monitoring and Assessment) project for improved and coordinated monitoring and assessment of San Diego River waters. The public release of the status sheets also advances Practical Vision Chapter 4 (Proactive Public Outreach and Communication) by providing information in a clear and useful manner.
- DISCUSSION: To effectively communicate the condition of regional waters, and consistent with the [“Framework for Monitoring and Assessment for the San Diego Region,”](#) staff are preparing a series of two-page status sheets as brief communications to apprise the Board and the public of the condition of watersheds in the region.
- The initial focus of some of the status sheets will be to answer the question: “Are ecosystems healthy?” based on biological community data (benthic macroinvertebrates and algae) as well as habitat assessments using the California Rapid Assessment Method (CRAM) for riparian wetlands. Data were collected via the Water Board’s SWAMP program and its partners (e.g., the

Southern California Stormwater Monitoring Coalition; SMC). The San Mateo Creek (Supporting Document No. 1) and San Diego River (Supporting Document No. 2) status sheets discussed today are the first in this series.

Results of monitoring surveys indicate that the San Mateo Creek watershed is an ecologically high-functioning watershed, with over 75 percent of its stream kilometers estimated to be in “good” or “excellent” condition based on the biological communities sampled. In many aspects, sites in this watershed scored higher than regional, high-quality “reference” condition sites.

The San Diego River watershed did not fare as well in the assessment, as only about one-third of its stream kilometers were estimated to be in “good” condition, and over half were in “poor” condition. The poorly scoring sites were largely concentrated in the lower watershed, where human pressures are highest. The basic groundwork for a long-term, coordinated San Diego River Watershed Monitoring and Assessment Program (SDRWMAP) has been laid out, with the establishment of a stakeholder group, compilation and analysis of existing data (e.g., the new status sheet described here), and preparation of a [report](#) detailing program elements. Next steps include facilitating integration of additional stakeholders in SDRWMAP and the SMC through permit modifications.

Another San Diego River status sheet has been prepared to answer the question: “Are fish safe to eat?” (Supporting Document No. 3) This report is based on results from a fish-tissue-contaminant monitoring study. Surveys of the river from 1979 to 1999 had found fish with chemicals above current State of California screening criteria, but results from more recent (2013-2015) sampling indicate that conditions in the San Diego River have improved. Pollutants that are currently banned from use in California (DDT, PCBs, Chlordane, and Dieldrin) had been present at elevated levels in the historic surveys but are no longer being detected in fish species in the river; however, mercury and selenium were found at high levels. Mercury was especially high in the top-predator, largemouth bass. Data will also be submitted to the State of California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, the agency responsible for developing formal fish and shellfish consumption advisories and guidelines.

LEGAL CONCERNS: None

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

1. San Mateo Creek watershed ecological condition status sheet
2. San Diego River watershed ecological condition status sheet
3. San Diego River fish tissue monitoring status sheet

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES:

N/A

COMPLIANCE RECORD:

N/A

PUBLIC NOTICE:

This item was publicly noticed in the Meeting Notice and Agenda for the June 22, 2016 meeting. The agenda notice for today's meeting was posted on the San Diego Water Board's website and sent to those subscribed to the email list for Board meetings.